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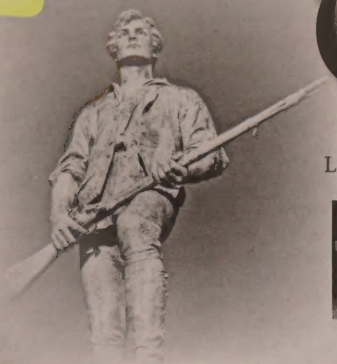

The Musket

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Department of Public Works Employees Protest Low Wages

Photo by Olivia Hoover. *Cary Memorial Hall, the location of the protests*

■ Vidula Mannem
Hannah Oh
Staff Writers

Prompted by the loss of skilled workers, a protest was held at Lexington's Special Town Meeting on Nov. 12. Twenty-nine members from both the Department of Public Works (DPW) Union and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) attended the event. AFSCME is a labor union that represents more than 45,000 local employees in the Northeast. Local 1703, one of its divisions, includes Lexington.

The DPW is comprised of seven major divisions that are responsible for tasks such as maintaining roads and overseeing water discharge and distribution. In recent years, long-time Lexington DPW members have been forced to switch jobs to surrounding towns that offer higher wages, oftentimes for similar, if not the same, work.

"[The workers] are understandably frustrated. So far, Lexington has lost more than 10 good employees to surrounding communities or companies that better compensate their DPW workers. Time and time again Lexington has hired, trained, and certified DPW employees only to see them leave for other positions in other communities," John Killoy, the Assistant Director of Legislation, Communications, and Political Action in the AFSCME, said.

DPW workers have been fighting for higher wage contracts over the past couple of years. These requests are still being reviewed by Lexington's town government.

"I was one of over 100 supporters at the informational picket on the 12th. Lexington DPW members were joined by other union members from the Greater Boston Labor Council, Community Labor United, the Lexington Education Association, Lexington Fire Fighters Union, and community supporters. For the past several months, Local 1703 has been a presence at all Selectmen and Town meetings to raise public awareness," Killoy said.

Members of multiple labor unions peacefully protested outside the meeting hall and informed passing motorists and town residents of the situation. Killoy believes that the process—which started in July of 2018—is costing Lexington skilled employees and sending the wrong message to DPW employees.

In fact, the Lexington DPW has been recognized for its exceptional compliance to management policies and dedication to the town's welfare by the American Public Works Association. However, in spite of receiving the prestigious APWA National Accreditation Award—which has only been given to 90 departments across America—Lexington has yet to follow the example of towns like Chicopee and West Newbury that have already implemented higher wage scales.

"Town officials have publicly stated that they wish to pay their employees at the 50th percentile in regards to comparable towns. That is all these men and women want—a fair wage for a fair day's work. They love the Town of Lexington and want to see it grow and blossom. Hopefully we can get to a point where the employees feel they're being treated fairly and being paid at a wage they can stay working for the town," Killoy said.

Some members of the LHS faculty agree with these protests for higher wages and would like to see a change in the treatment of DPW employees.

"The DPW does absolutely critical work for this town, and when there is critical work to be done, you need good people who can be trusted to do the job well. It makes sense to me that you aren't going to attract and retain good people for these important roles when they can find better compensation in close by communities," Daniel Abramovich, a physics teacher at LHS, said.

Town Manager James Malloy and DPW Union director David Pinsonneault declined to comment on the current state of negotiations.

Challenge Day Challenges Social Barriers

■ Sreenidhi Dharmaraj
Bella Gharabegian
Staff Writers

On Nov. 18, around 100 Lexington High School students and faculty participated in Challenge Day, an anti-bullying initiative that took place in the LHS field house during the school day. They discussed a wide range of issues that impact the school community, such as the presence of cliques, harassment, and stereotypes.

Students were split up into smaller groups, called "families," in which they shared personal stories and opened up about past experiences. These families were led by volunteer faculty mentors. The goal of this activity was to push people out of their comfort zones and foster a supportive community.

"I think it is really powerful how much people opened up about their lives with kids they have just met. It's important for schools to provide programs like Challenge Day because it helps us connect with each other and learn from each other's experiences. I left with a much stronger sense of understanding and empathy for my peers," Katerine Lawee, a senior, said.

This open atmosphere allowed students to express emotional vulnerability. They were able to bring up their troubles and work through them with the support of their group.

"I had a conversation with a couple people that addressed some underlying awkwardness between us. It was a very open conversation which left us both feeling relieved afterwards," Sophia Cox, a senior, said.

Cox believes that these types of events guide LHS students and staff towards building a more inclusive and empathic school community by demonstrating that everyone has a story.

"I think it's a good chance to [acknowledge] the unseen struggles of our peers … I was especially touched by how open our two teacher group members were. They spoke to us as peers instead of students and opened up equally, if not more than, the other students and myself," Cox said.

A limited number of students and faculty are chosen to participate in Challenge Day each year. Lawee hopes that this restriction will be lifted in the future.

"The only thing I wish could be changed is the number of participants allowed. They only take about 100 each year, and it would be nice for everyone to get to experience it," Lawee said.

LHS' Lack of Academic Integrity

■ The Ediorial Board

It's something we've all encountered before. It might be a friend asking for a few questions on a math test or a side glance towards an English quiz. Like many other schools, Lexington High School has a rampant cheating culture. Students are often seen openly exchanging answers or discussing test questions. Giving away answers seems counterintuitive to the educative environment the school attempts to foster, so why does it happen?

It stems from the larger issue of LHS students compromising academic integrity for the sake of their GPA.

"It reflects on LHS culture as a whole when you have cheating that is so normalized. It shows that students care more about their grades than anything else," Arushi Kalpande, a senior, said.

Grades are used to measure a student's comprehension of different subjects. They should be seen as progress markers, but LHS's competitive environment morphs students' perspectives to see them merely as a means to a college admission. If students could channel the energy they spend memorizing the first letters on a multiple-choice test into a simple review guide, this problem could largely be avoided.

Logically, cheating can only be detrimental if you're the one enabling it. For example, say you take a test first block. If you give answers to a friend who takes it later and they do better, that means that the overall curve gets higher. Oftentimes, teachers modify the difficulty of tests based on how students do on prior ones. Thus, cheating can cause teachers to overestimate students' abilities and make future assessments and assignments more difficult than students can handle.

Honestly, we aren't trying to take a holier-than-thou stance. We've all panicked the night before a test and wondered whether skipping it would be better than doing poorly. We've thought about emailing our English teacher for a last-minute extension on that essay we'd had weeks to work on.

However, we've realized that this work ethic isn't sustainable, and acknowledging this unsustainability is the first step to changing our study practices. If you know you're going to be overwhelmed during a particular week, make sure to let those teachers know. Asking teachers for extensions in advance, which also makes them more willing to grant it because they know you haven't been procrastinating. Do your homework and study for tests before beginning that Netflix binge.

You're smart. If you work hard, you don't need to cheat. College talk and maintaining your grades can be overwhelming, but cheating will only hurt you in the long run.

Collegebored

■ Elizabeth Zhang
Columnist

Us seniors have lost most of our motivation at this point—most, if not all of it. We've used all our energy and brain cells making Quarter 1 all nice and pretty, but now she's gone, and we're done. You thought we were slacking off then—ha, psych! Unless you're someone like me, who maybe accidentally watched too many hours of YouTube instead of studying derivatives, just look at us now.

Quarter 2 is brutal in many ways. You want to just SIT and gaze off into the distance, but—and I hate to be that person—grades still matter. Like, please, just let me live already. I don't want round two of the stress of Quarter 1. I want to FEEL ALIVE AGAIN and become my true self: back slouched on the couch, stomach sticking out of the pajamas I haven't changed out of in days, hands in piles of Lay's Sour Cream and Onion chips, and finally, have some nice, genuine, productive binging of twenty years worth of anime, Harry Potter movies, and reading Wattpad and all those good books I've never had the chance to finish throughout my four tormenting years here.

Honestly, we all know I'm exaggerating (just a little). But the truth is seniors are going to struggle. Everyone will. But especially seniors, and you won't know the real struggle until you're actually here, so don't give me that "but you're a senior" defense. Harder topics will be covered in your classes, final deadlines are approaching, life situations happen, and for fellow music pursuers, auditions are about to slap us all at once. It's all going to be dumped on us like a garbage truck. It's going to be ugly.

Not to be cheesy or anything, but just think about it—it's technically the last quarter of our high school lives. The last quarter that matters, anyway. We've pushed, fallen, had mental breakdowns, and internally or externally screamed (see: scream in the quad). But we've also smiled and laughed during difficult times. I'm begging you: please smile just a little bit more. I know it's hard to do; it's hard to strain those muscles for those last few moments. It's going to be like Hockmeyer Studios senior portraits all over again, and we all know how that went. Still, I want to see you smile. Even if you don't want me to see you smile, someone does, whether you believe it or not. We want to see your real smile—the one that comes at the start of the second semester.

Quarter 2 is brutal. But if you really think about how far we've come and how close (but still kind of far) the end is, it can be brutally brilliant. Just don't think about it too much and forget to study for physics.

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Correspondence to The Musket c/o Lexington High School, 251 Waltham St., Lexington, MA 02421 or by email to musketnews@gmail.com. Short, tasteful responses are welcome.

Dialogue: New Homework Policy

■ Francis Liu
Andrea Reier
Staff Writers

Pros

This year, Lexington High School implemented a new homework policy which designates no homework weekends at the end of each month, replacing the previous policy that prohibited homework on religious and national holidays. While many students have complained about the loss of homework-free, three day weekends or tests the day after Thanksgiving break, the new homework policy offers many benefits to both students and staff.

Teachers are able to keep their classes on track more easily, especially in AP classes, where a wide range of material must be covered in order for students to be prepared for the test in May. The new policy is much more flexible than the previous one, allocating more days devoted to school work while providing intermediate breaks.

"I think that kids at the high school level have a lot of agency and they have to make choices about what classes to take, so if you take a higher level class, I think there should be an expectation that you do more work and that is something teenagers need to learn to manage. But I also think that it is important to have a healthy balance in life and you're already at school for seven hours a day and having planned breaks is a good thing," Alexandra Lonardo, an English teacher, said.

Furthermore, some LHS students do not even celebrate the no-homework alloted holidays from the previous policy, making the no-homework holidays an unnecessary break for them. It can also result in unintentional insensitivity towards students, if their peers perceive their religious holidays solely as "no homework days."

This new policy does take the needs of students who celebrate religious holidays into account. If a student celebrates a holiday that would make it difficult for them to complete multiple assignments, they can ask their teacher to be excused from doing the homework on those days.

"It was Diwali, and I knew that when I went home, I had many religious commitments, so I went up to my teacher and asked if I could postpone my homework, and I was allowed to," Kunal Kapoor, a sophomore, said.

By having a designated no-homework weekend every month, not only are instructors able to teach the necessary concepts for each class without hindrance, but students are also allowed a much needed break from the stress of studying for tests, completing labs, and finishing all of their homework.

Cons

The new homework policy is simply terrible. The policy masks itself as a harbinger of progress to help destress Lexington High School students in our rigorous academic climate, but when it comes down to it, it's neither effective nor useful.

Firstly, the last Monday of the month, on which homework cannot be collected conveniently happens to fall right after December, February, and April break. This means that we aren't reaping the benefits of this policy because most teachers don't assign homework over long breaks anyway. For shorter breaks like Thanksgiving, the homework policy only applies to the weekend beforehand. Unlike the weekends we are often spending time playing sports or doing our homework, breaks provide a unique opportunity to spend time with family and travel. Assigning homework during this period is a huge inconvenience for students who are seeking to detox from the stress of school. Additionally, it takes away from spending quality time with family that we otherwise don't get because of our demanding time commitments.

"Due to the fact that I had lots of homework, I was unable to help my family prepare the Thanksgiving meal," Gabriel Shiu, a sophomore, said.

Moreover, the homework policy pretends to account for students who observe religious holidays. Even though religious students are excused from doing homework over these holidays, this doesn't automatically solve the problem. This forces students who may not be comfortable sharing their religious identity to out themselves to their teachers and potentially classmates as well. This is especially problematic for students who observe religious holidays outside of Christianity. For example, the homework policy falls on days that benefit those who may or may not observe Christian holidays; this includes December break and Easter.

There is also a clear risk of this policy not being enforced. While holidays are definite markers of no homework days, remembering the last weekend of each month is not as easy for teachers. This is reinforced by the fact that there isn't a legitimate excuse to not have homework during the last weekend, allowing teachers who disliked the previous homework policy to find loopholes or to pressure students to complete homework anyway. There have already been issues reported about teachers violating the homework policy from last year, which should have called for a reform that institutes stricter measures to prevent that. Instead of reforming the policy, the school created an entirely new policy that enables this rule-breaking even more.

Students Shouldn't Attend Conferences

■ Angie Leung
Lydia Rommel
Staff Writers

On Dec. 2, Lexington High School students had a school day off for teachers to hold optional parent-teacher conferences. Conferences allow parents to understand what classes their child is taking, meet their teachers, and give students an opportunity to review their progress. However, students should not be present at all conferences.

Many students would rather not attend parent-teacher conferences because they feel the meetings are unnecessary and prefer to receive their teacher's feedback through their parents. Even without their children, parents can tour the school and meet all the teachers by themselves. Because most students don't have an incentive to attend the conferences, if a new policy of mandatory student attendance was instituted, fewer families would sign up for them to begin with. Although this is not a proposed policy, it is a practice that some teachers have begun to implement.

The students of LHS don't feel it's necessary that they attend parent-teacher conferences unless they want to, and the school should respect their wishes.

"I think it should be the choice of the family," Helen Tang, a junior, said. "Sometimes, when the student is there, the teacher wants to not be fully honest."

To get personalized teacher input, students can stay after school, come before school, sign up for I block, or correspond by email.

Most teachers request that students who are struggling in their classes go to their conferences because it might be helpful. However, students should be able to determine whether they are having trouble themselves and choose if they should attend conferences or not.

"In some cases, it is not appropriate for students to attend and it can hinder your discussions," Alyssa Creney, a freshman English teacher, said.

LHS shouldn't require students and parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and instead, allow them to determine whether going is in their best interests. These conferences serve as an opportunity for parents and students to communicate with teachers. Making conferences mandatory for students would mean taking their choices away to decide whether they are beneficial, undermining the purpose of the conference itself.

One-Credit Gym Classes—A Change for the Better

■ Zahra Karim
Meher Khanna
Staff Writers

At the start of the 2019-2020 school year, Lexington High School implemented a new gym policy. Instead of half-credit, quarterly rotating gyms, they are now separated into one credit semester-long classes.

Although students have different beliefs regarding the advantages and disadvantages of this new system, it is ultimately a positive change.

For example, this policy is better at improving students' fitness since they can take two gym classes that incorporate complimentary fitness techniques that target distinct skills.

"I can become stronger and learn more in-depth in two related topics because I have the opportunity to improve my skills over the course of two quarters, instead of only doing one course over the course of the quarter," Meiling Bottan, a junior, said.

Semester classes can also give students more opportunities to show their hard work in order to improve grades, as well as make strong connections with peers in their gym classes.

"I think semester classes are better because if in one quarter you are absent more, or have a worse grade, you have another quarter to bring up the bad grade. It leaves room for more improvement, [and] you can also get more comfortable around your class and teacher, and form better friendships," Sarena Shah, a sophomore, said.

The policy does not only impact students, but also gym teachers. The new change could lighten the load on instructors.

"Last year my gym teachers told my class about the new policy. They said it made it easier for teachers to grade with semester courses, because they don't have as many new students every quarter. In addition, creating schedules would be much simpler because gym classes would not change every quarter," Bottan said.

Students have varied opinions on the topic, but as a general trend, the policy brings more unity to gym class and reduces unnecessary chaos without stripping students of too much freedom.

Think Fast–The Improv Troupe Has Spontaneous Fun

Aahan Mehra
Shashwati Sanjay
Staff Writers

Photo by Phoebe Tian. *The LHS Improv Troupe prepares for their upcoming performance.*

The stage is set and the topic is "Space." You rise up to the call, becoming Captain Cosmos, interplanetary explorer extraordinaire. Your friends join you on stage, becoming Lieutenant Nova, Navigator Sirius, Doctor Halley, and of course, the one-eyed alien from the newly discovered planet, Zoob. You aren't on stage anymore; you are in space with your fellow explorers, meeting an alien from another planet. You are imagining your own story and acting it out. This is improvisational theatre.

Improv is a form of theatre that is unplanned and created spontaneously by the performers working together. Its techniques are often used by actors during rehearsals and auditions.

Lexington High School has a student-run Improv Troupe.

"They do improv shows once a month during the school year," Jillian Singer-Wong, a drama teacher at LHS, said. "The skills they need include thinking quickly, listening and clear character choices."

It might seem unintuitive that a completely improvised show requires a lot of practice, but practicing improv is extremely important.

"I find it easier to think about practicing improv like one might practice a sport. A good soccer team, for example, practices a lot in order to play well in a game. They do different drills that work on strengthening particular skills so that when it comes time to play a game…they have all of the tools necessary to win. We do the exact same thing to prepare for a show; we practice different games that focus on certain skills such as character building, plot development, and listening," Daniel Winter, a senior and member of the Improv Troupe, said.

He first developed a passion for acting after his mother took him to an LHS play in fifth grade. That passion fueled his decision to join the Improv Troupe in middle school, and then in high school.

"I immediately fell in love with the idea of putting on a completely made-up show with friends and making people laugh. When I got to high school I was lucky enough to make it on the troupe as a freshman and I still remember how cool it felt to get to do what I had been so excited by in my youth," Winters said.

Their next show is on Feb. 14th. Come, watch, and have fun listening to their clever jokes and witty puns.

Behind the Scenes: LHS Tech Crew

Manon LeDonne
Vani Sharma
Staff Writers

Photo by Anya Ghali *Alex Littlewood, at the Tech room.*

One of the great parts about seeing a production is the visuals: the seamless transitions between scenes, the set, the lighting on the characters. This doesn't happen by itself, so how does it come together?

The Lexington High School Drama Production finished their self-written play, "The Mendelssohn Project," this past November. While it seemed like the show magically came to be, there was an enormous amount of effort put in behind the scenes. The students responsible are known as the LHS Tech Crew, or the "techies" for short.

"When most people think of us, they picture us designing, building, and painting sets for plays at LHS," Alexander Littlewood, a junior, and Tech manager said. "But Tech is much more than that; it encompasses the creation and planning of all the props, audio, mics, spotlights, hanging lights, moving setpieces during plays, and our stage managers act as a link among the actors, techies and directors."

Located just near the auditorium is the room where the magic happens. The tech room, home to all the techies, is filled with machinery that is designed for the creation of sets.

Over the course of the year, the techies take on two theatrical productions: the fall play and the spring musical. Being a techie requires a lot of effort, but the time and hard work spent with other people produces gratifying relationships.

"My favorite part of being a techie is that you end up being friends with your co-workers," Olivia McRedmond, a sophomore, said. "We even have a joke about how the upperclassmen have adopted the underclassmen and become 'tech parents'."

Despite the hard work needed to be on Tech Crew, it is open to anyone who might feel a desire to create.

"When you're a techie, there aren't too many things you need to learn," Katie Mitchell, a freshman, said. "You really just need an open mind, good work ethic, and patience."

The next time you go to see a play at LHS, remember the magic on stage is truly the product of hard work, often times behind the scenes.

Spreading Gratitude Around LHS: Thanksgiving Turkeys

Avni Kamat
Samiha Kazi
Staff Writers

With the spirit of Thanksgiving in the air before November break, Lexington High School's annual Thanksgiving Turkeys tradition was a success.

In homeroom, students received small pieces of paper on which they could write a note of gratitude to a friend, peer, or teacher. The Student-Faculty Senate's Social Actions Committee then sorted the notes by school building and delivered the turkeys to their respective recipients in homeroom the following week.

From the Senate's perspective, this annual tradition provides an outlet to create a greater sense of community around LHS by inviting individuals to thank people in their life.

"Whether it's writing to a friend, classmate, or teacher, the Thanksgiving Turkeys allow for people to reflect on who they are thankful for. In a school where everyone is extremely busy, and often distracted by their own lives, these provide little sparks of joy for givers and receivers all around," Aria Maher, a sophomore member of the Senate Oversight Committee, said.

On both the receiving and the giving end, many students have been able to connect with this initiative meaningfully, illustrating the great impact a small act of kindness can bring.

Students who gave someone a Turkey took this opportunity to reach out to those who matter to them and let them know they are grateful.

"I think that for a lot of people, giving away turkeys is a great way to feel the satisfaction of making somebody else's day," Bryn Jones, a sophomore, said.

On the other side of the process, many students who received a Thanksgiving Turkey in homeroom were thankful for the pleasant surprise and recognition.

"It's truly amazing to know that someone took time out of their day to write you a turkey. It helps me to reflect on how I'm so lucky to be surrounded by such loving friends and family," Anisha Snell, a sophomore, said.

The positive effect Thanksgiving Turkeys have on students seems to be snowballing into a greater effect on the Lexington High School community.

"I feel like at LHS a lot of students get wrapped up in their school work and social media, and very few people take the time to express any appreciation for their friends and teachers. The Thanksgiving Turkeys are a nice break from all that stress and negativity," Abigail Sommers, a junior, said.

Snell and Jones, along with many other students, echoed the sentiment that Thanksgiving Turkeys foster positive emotions to strengthen the community at the high school, which was the essential goal of the Senate initiative.

"It's a great tradition that LHS should be proud of," Jones said.

LHS Musicians Make Strides at Carnegie Hall

Varun Suraj
Rebecca Gu
Staff Writers

This coming April, the Lexington High School Wind Ensemble and Chamber Orchestra will travel to New York City to perform at the WorldStrides National Wind and Band Orchestra Festival in Carnegie Hall.

The two groups, along with 12 other ensembles, were selected out of more than 400 bands and orchestras from across the country through an application process that required, among other things, their resumé and a recent recording. A total of 100 students from both LHS ensembles will be attending.

This trip marks the first year that LHS music groups have the chance to go to this festival, in one of the most acclaimed music halls in the world. They will be judged by several notable band and orchestral figures, including Frank Battisti, H. Robert Reynolds, Craig Kirchhoff, and Charles Peltz.

"It's a pretty great opportunity to get some wonderful performance recognition as well as get some really great feedback from the adjudicators," Jared Cassedy, the Lexington Public Schools Performing Arts Coordinator and Wind Ensemble conductor, said.

Other faculty members expressed similar enthusiasm towards the opportunity.

"Carnegie Hall is such an honor for anyone, to grace the stage and to be able to do that in high school is just like a really special opportunity," Rachel Jayson, the conductor of Chamber Orchestra, said.

A large part of the experience will include bonding with fellow student musicians across both ensembles, as well as with musicians performing from other schools.

"I think growing closer as friends, as people, transfers over to a musical setting," Khoi Le, a junior and Wind Ensemble percussionist, said. "You're able to understand each others' sounds, see where you fit into the whole blend aspect of the music, which is very valuable for any ensemble."

Cassedy wants the students to take away the cumulative experience of the festival and to appreciate their hard work.

"It's not about playing every single note perfectly or every single phrase exactly this way or that way," Cassedy said. "It's about that collaborative journey that we're having from the very beginning, and then it's that output and that final product that is the result of the collaboration and the connection, which I think is really special."

Photo by Garen Sahakian. *Mr. Cassedy and Ms. Jayson, LPS music educators*

Apart from the festival, the groups will get to sightsee tourist attractions, watch Broadway shows, and visit museums in New York..

"I think it's just a nice reminder that the world is a big place, and music has the capacity to give those kinds of experiences," Jayson said.

The Wind Ensemble began preparing over the summer but has only recently started practicing the intended music. The Chamber Orchestra has yet to begin preparation, as they are still in the process of receiving commissioned pieces.

"We're planning on performing two commissioned pieces, which I'm excited to present at Carnegie Hall because [they haven't] really been heard," Jayson said.

The groups will be in New York from April 9-12, right before Easter Day.

Senate Organizes Mental Health Day

Daisy Li
Sanjay Mallikarjun
Staff Writers

Lexington High School's Student-Faculty Senate is in the process of organizing a school-wide Mental Health Day with the objective of fighting stigma surrounding mental health. Senate hopes that Mental Health Day will provide students with an opportunity to take a break from their regular school day and discuss mental health issues in a safe environment.

Mental Health Day was inspired by a similar program run at Arlington High School called Inclusion Day, and by similar LHS events such as Challenge Day.

"We felt that we needed an event or an activity to organize and unify the school around issues such as mental health," David Cai, a senior and Chair of the Policy Committee, said.

Currently, Senate plans to set aside two blocks during the school day where students can sign up for workshops, similar to signing up for I Block.

"We have a bunch of events led by student leaders as well as teachers in order to address things like mental health. So that could include things like yoga or classes on time management," Cai said.

The project is still in its planning phase so the Senate welcomes students and faculty to share their ideas.

"The schedule and the program is still really open to interpretation, so if anyone's reading this article and would like to come talk to the Senate about what they want to see for Mental Health Day, that would be really, really helpful," Caroline Li, a senior and Senate Moderator, said.

One of the primary goals of Mental Health Day is to allow students to feel comfortable sharing their own perspectives surrounding mental health issues in order to spark conversation.

"If we are able to, as a community, create a space that is open and accepting of different perspectives or ideas regarding mental health and other issues, then it will lead to more genuine conversation that can potentially change the ways in which we view each other and change the ways we can interact," Cai said.

Another goal of the event is to encourage the LHS community to take mental health just as seriously as physical health.

"I think it's really important to acknowledge mental health because it's not really something you can see, whereas physical health, for example if you break your arm, you're obviously going to go right to the doctor and get it treated. For mental health, it's really important to know that even if someone looks really happy, they could be hiding something," Joy Gong, a junior, said.

Li believes that the problem with the recent attempts to fight mental health issues is that they only address surface-level causes.

"I think a lot of the cultural attitude at LHS surrounding stress and anxiety is, 'the way to solve it is to reduce the amount of work that you do,' which is not quite the right approach," Li said.

Rather, the Senate strives to address the root causes of mental health issues at LHS.

"We think that, as a community, we need to address this issue head on and address the competitive nature and spirit of the school," Cai said.

Harlan Cohen Presents at College Success Night

Srija Ghosh
Ashna Mitta
Staff Writers

Harlan Cohen, a New York Times bestselling author of five books, visited Lexington High School on Nov. 20 to talk to parents and students about college planning.

The opportunity to invite Cohen presented itself when LHS staff members discovered he ran workshops in the area.

"We coordinated to bring him here last March. The focus of it was it was for juniors and seniors and their parents and it's called 'College Success Night' to prepare, plan, and navigate all the changes ahead," Joanne Loomer, an LHS social worker, said.

Cohen's talk was called "Happy, Healthy, Almost Stress-Free, College Planning," and focused on finding the right college fit for each student.

"He humanizes the process and focuses more on the importance of a school matching a student's personality and needs, rather than the GPA or standardized data points and the school's ranking," Melissa Buttaro, an LHS counselor, said.

Cohen has structured his books around the college experience and addresses various issues that come up when entering college. LHS began to promote him to help upperclassmen, understand more about the college process, minimize stress when applying, and thrive on the campus they end up at.

To encourage students to read Cohen's work, the LHS counselors sent out an email to parents and students that summarized the utility of his books and speeches.

"Harlan has trained students, parents, and professionals to dream big, navigate change, and lead with confidence and clarity. His live events, books, online programs, and workshops will change your life, impact your communities, and get you to places you've always wanted to go," the email wrote.

Despite the common belief that a student's hard work is done once accepted to a college, Cohen believes that receiving an acceptance letter is only the beginning.

"College success is more than getting in—it's about staying in, thriving on campus, and graduating with a degree, a purpose, and passion," Cohen said on his website.

Buttaro also stressed the importance of college as a stepping stone, rather than a final destination.

"I think it's important for students to know that they are more than their GPA and standardized test scores. They also need to be aware that college isn't going to be a magical, perfect experience, even if they do get into their first-choice school. There are going to be some challenging, gross, and frustrating experiences, and they need to know who and where to go to, and to be patient in handling situations," Buttaro said.

Loomer hopes that Cohen's advice will stay with seniors as they go through the application process.

"It's important to think about what makes sense for a student, and not just a big name school. [Cohen] wants students and parents to think about what really makes sense, rather than what sounds good or looks good, or what your expectations are," Loomer said.

Artist of the Issue: Sydney Hart

Sarah Meyer
Rachel Zhang
Staff Writer

The cast of The Mendelssohn Project stole the Lexington High School stage from Nov. 21-23. From the costumes to the script to the set, virtually all aspects of the play were made possible by the students of LHS.

Senior Sydney Hart starred as Fanny Mendelssohn, the historic female protagonist of the play. However, due to the student-written nature of the play, the way she landed her role was unlike other auditioning processes.

"The audition process was kind of a bunch of improv games, we did a couple of little scene creations, movement exercises—stuff like that," Hart said.

However, her journey to becoming the lead didn't stop there, since they still had to write the play. As the play is based on historical events, the cast looked to combine historical accuracy with originality. This required a deep understanding of the history behind characters as well as a long process of trial and error.

"We started the process learning about the Mendelssohn family and about Fanny's history so that we had that to work off of," Hart said.

After obtaining a deep understanding of the historical context, they began a long process of experimentation in order to produce an engaging and original piece. This process meant that many scenes were not included in the final version of the play.

"We would break into random groups and create scenes for characters that didn't end up in the play most of the time," Hart said.

Part of what made this production possible was the incredibly cohesive community formed by the cast.

"Typically we don't have many freshmen, if any at all, but we had six freshmen in the play this year, which is shocking, and then only one sophomore and two juniors, but they were all just incredible, and so [we] kind of [had] that complete grade-span and their energy with those of us who have been here for longer and are more tired of the program. So it was really fun, and it was a really tight-knit community," Hart said.

Photo by Athena Li.
Senior Sydney Hart, star of the play.

Choruses Celebrate Lexington Symphony Orchestra's Anniversary

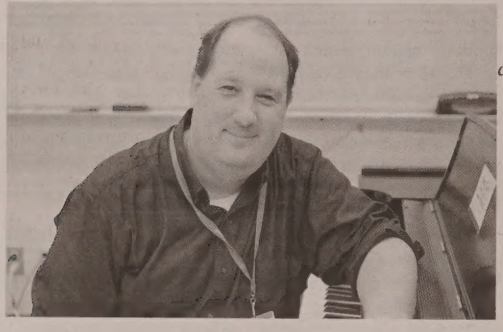


Photo by Disha Sankholkar.
Jason Iannuzzi, LHS chorus director

Anika Basu
Christina Li
Staff Writers

This past November, the Lexington Symphony Orchestra celebrated its 25th Anniversary by holding two concerts at Cary Memorial Hall in Lexington.

The concerts took place on Nov. 9 and Nov. 10. Lexington High School's honors choruses were featured in the concerts alongside the Lexington Children's Choir, the Master Singers of Lexington, and soloists from nearby conservatories.

Jason Iannuzzi, the Director of Choral programs at LHS, oversaw the preparation and conducted the singers and Lexington Symphony in the first half of the program. Jonathan McPhee, Music Director of the Lexington Symphony, conducted the second half of the program.

Iannuzzi is proud of his students' performance.

"I felt the students did a lot to bring the work to life. Their approach was detailed and their performance was energized. Over the course of the conductor's rehearsal and dress rehearsals, students made requested changes quickly and responded to Maestro McPhee with a high level of professionalism," Iannuzzi said.

Helen Bultman, a junior and member of Concert Choir, takes pride in the chorus's ability to thrive within the space given to them.

"Carmina Burana is usually performed in a concert hall. To have it performed in a small-ish space, it's amazing that we were able to accomplish this in one small town, with mostly residents of Lexington," Bultman said.

The piece is often described as satirical and irreverent, and celebrates the course of human life. Both Bultman and Helen Tang, a fellow member of Concert Choir, enjoyed the storyline and emotions within various movements of the piece. They believe the meaning of the piece reflects the purpose of the concert: celebrating the existence of the Lexington Symphony Orchestra.

The community's reception to the concerts reflected the pride of the performers.

"I think what stands out most about this performance was the ovationary response from the audience members. I am still receiving emails from folks in the community, many of whom have never heard our choruses and the quality of their work before," Iannuzzi said.

The widely-praised performances were a product of hours of rehearsal.

"As part of our preparation of this piece, we talked a lot about the origins of the text and the economical composing means Orff used to express them…And we spent many hours perfecting our diction of the German-Latin texts," Iannuzzi said.

A common sentiment among Iannuzzi and members of the honors choruses is an appreciation for the opportunities and passion within LHS' performing arts community.

"I'm so glad that I live in a town where music and arts are priorities. We're really so lucky. There are so many people who are passionate and want to pursue music in any way, shape, or form—not just professionally—and they want to be involved in this community," Eleanor Caro, a freshman, said.

Chamber Orchestra Commissions a Piece by Circus-Composer

Gaeun Suh
Zhuoran Wen
Staff Writers

On Nov. 15, Sxip Shirey, an avante-garde composer, visited Lexington High School to oversee a piece for the Chamber Orchestra. The performer and circus-composer, known for his experimental sound, was commissioned by LHS teacher and conductor Rachel Jayson.

Shirey cited Kendrick Lamar as the inspiration for his composition.

"This piece was a reaction to hearing the brilliant production and electronic orchestration on his song 'I Love Myself,'" Shirey said.

Members of the orchestra appreciate the unique nature of his piece.

"Playing through the riff of the third movement of the piece was interesting. [Sxip's] not a string instrument player—he plays guitar and uses machines to produce sound effects. He saw how it sounds on different instruments, and experimented with different articulations and various ways of playing it," Eliza Manasas, a junior violinist, said.

Shirey has composed for multiple orchestras, including the renowned Boston Pops Orchestra. Despite his experience, this commission has been a new experience for him.

"My orchestral scoring has been mainly for film and theater, and the players are virtual in those cases. It's still a new thing for me to have work performed by a live orchestra," Shirey said.

He has found the collaboration with the student orchestra enjoyable.

"Working with the LHS Chamber Orchestra has been easy," Shirey said. "Rachel is so good with the students, and they are responsive to her. For me, it's rather brilliant, and I can't wait to come back with more music for them to play—I just dipped my toe in. I need more."

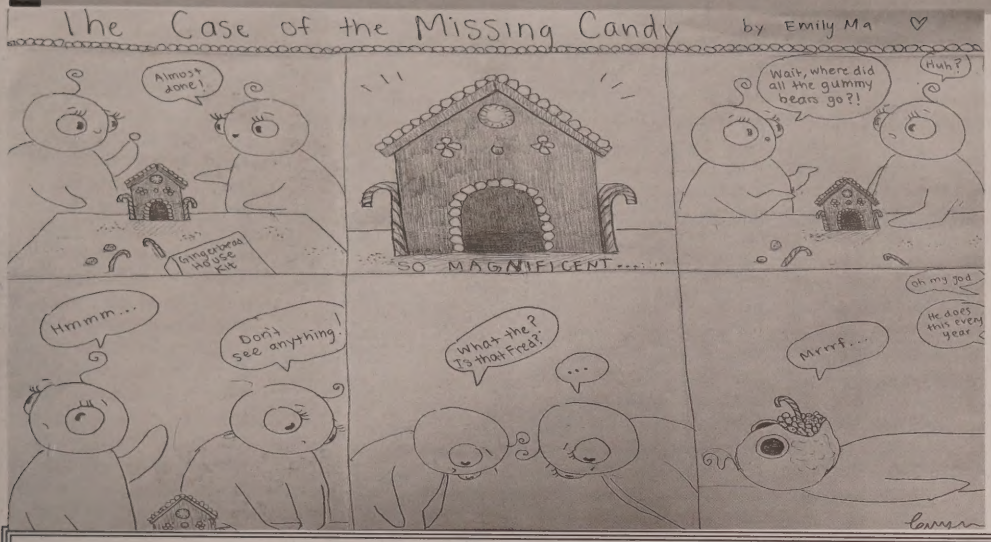
The composer noted how the experience was educational, not just for the students, but for himself.

"I feel fortunate to get to work with this orchestra. I am always learning—this is a great opportunity for us all to learn. There are so many different ways to be a composer and musician in the world. I hope these young musicians pick up on that from me," he said.

Shirey's collaboration with the Chamber Orchestra diversified perspectives on composition for members of the orchestra.

"It's a cool experience because no one else has played it before. You are playing around with the piece with the composer. Being in direct contact with the composer helps clarify the piece," Manasas said.

The piece, which is yet to be named, is still in progress. Shirey expects to finish the main movement in December.



■ Emily Ma
News Editor

LHS Cafeteria Food

■ Evan Li
Columnist

Cafeteria food at Lexington High School is a polarizing topic. Some stay loyal to the long sandwich line, the impatient grab a burger and fries, and the hungry wait for a mountain of nachos. Others can't bear to mix in with the masses of people scrambling in the lunch lines and choose to haul around their own lunch box.

The school has tried many times to "liven up" the food scene, introducing fresh fish and hot chocolate over the last few months. However, it's more often than not that you'll hear people complaining about egregiously long lines, critiquing the stale fries, and gossiping about the suspicious chicken parmesan-topped pizza. Personally, I could nitpick on so many aspects of the cafeteria food—is that really "sushi" that they are selling for almost twice the price of a regular lunch? What's really inside the weirdly chewy "dumpling" slathered with slimy sweet and sour sauce?

It's easy to critique something you're accustomed to—the repetition of getting the same sandwich order every day for the past few years means you're bound to find a flaw or two (they're always either under-grilled or over-grilled, or the pesto is too oily and overpowers everything else). It's also easy to critique change—there are many who point looks of disgust towards the new fresh fish option, yet have never dared to try it. So many students exist in a contradicting state of wanting, yet rejecting, novelty.

Cafeteria food is the epitome of a "love-hate" relationship. Many complain about the lack of diverse options, yet don't hesitate twice to gulf down beef nachos during every third lunch. So, I believe our criticism must be constructive; otherwise, side-comments merely circulate in an echo-chamber of complaints.

The reason why constructive criticism is so difficult, I believe, is because the cafeteria staff does quite a decent job. Most complaints are usually found on personal preference and cannot be generalized for broader change. Cafeteria food will obviously not be Michelin-star quality. Thus, it should not be held to a standard of perfection. People inevitably get bored and find problems with repetition. If you ate at your favorite restaurant every day, after a couple of months, it would probably become the place you most despise. Students should place each dissatisfaction with LHS food in a larger context.

Ultimately, school food serves the basic function of keeping students healthy and fed. We should be grateful that most cafeteria workers don't hesitate to give you an extra slice of spicy chicken in your sandwich or an additional dollop of gravy on your mashed potatoes.

How To Take Care of Yourself During the Winter Blues

■ Emily Weinberg
Columnist

As the trees dust with snow and holiday music plays on every radio station, I'm sure many of us know the lurking feeling of depression that comes with winter. This feeling causes many of us to lose motivation and, like bears, retreat into our caves to hibernate.

Perhaps it's the enormous amount of gift shopping, the pressure of college applications, or the bleak weather. Winter can be challenging for many, but for some, a mood disorder causes depression to creep in with the cold. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) affects roughly fifteen percent of Americans. It is a mood disorder that is characterized by depression that returns at approximately the same time each year. While this disorder only occurs at a particular time of the year and is not the same as clinical depression, if left untreated, SAD can make it very difficult for people to go about their daily lives.

It's easy for us to allow ourselves to be drained by the weather, stop pushing ourselves to do our best, and stop enjoying time with the people around us. However, we must work to prevent this cycle and prepare ourselves for difficult times.

While I have clinical depression, I also have SAD, which makes the depression that I have get a little worse in the winter months. And so, I've picked up some skills for taking care of myself during the difficult seasons.

When I start feeling sad, I reach out to my friends from group therapy or my counselor to make sure that I have positive coping skills for times when I am alone. If you feel unsafe, please reach out to a counselor, nurse, or trusted adult, so you can receive the support you need.

I have also started using apps on my phone to track my mood when I take my medication so that I can better understand what is going on in my brain. My doctor also recommended a synthetic sunlight lamp to balance brain neurotransmitters such as melatonin (sleep) and serotonin (happiness). Another useful coping tool you can use is exercising to get endorphins (another happy chemical) flowing and also to help you feel good about yourself.

In the times where I find myself too tired or unmotivated to do my homework, I have learned to set small goals for myself and break big tasks into smaller ones. Afterward, I reward myself by, for example, taking a short break to relax.

One of the skills I practice every day is listening to happy holiday music or watching winter classics because they allow me to focus on the positives of the season. Even though I get hated on for listening to "All I Want For Christmas" on repeat, it helps boost my mood, so I turn it up.

Overall, something hard that I've learned in high school is that your mental health is more important than your GPA. Your GPA will suffer if you're not taking care of yourself, and if you reach out and are honest, most teachers will try to accommodate you to the best of their abilities. School is tough, and the winter season can be too, but you got this.

So throughout this holiday season, blast the holiday music, get your work done, and be sure to take care of yourself.

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Girls Varsity Volleyball Makes a Comeback

Vedanti Bhargava
Victor Chen
Staff Writers

On Oct. 29, the Lexington High School girls varsity volleyball team competed in the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association 2019 Girls Volleyball Tournament at North Andover High School. It was the team's first tournament game in seven years and was the result of hard work during practices and a strong level of unity and trust among team members.

"Because it was our first time in the playoffs for all of us [varsity players], we were very ecstatic, but nervous as well. The high school and their gym was spacious, which we weren't quite used to yet, but we stepped inside with positivity and excitement," Jenny Park, a senior, said.

Park attributed their success to their chemistry as a team.

"I would describe our team as dynamic. Everybody on the team has their own uniqueness which generated an enriching experience for all of us. We are all very supportive of each other, which really shaped us into a close-knit team," Park said.

Coach Charlotte Parish also spoke about the anxiety the players feel before they go to play in the game.

"The most difficult element of a playoff game is the mental element. Even the most prepared team can get nervous or overexcited," Parish said.

However, she and the team employed various strategies to overcome this feeling of anxiety to perform well in their game.

"With that in mind, before the game I tried to keep the team low-key and focused. Also, in practice the days before we played matches with adjusted rules that made it more challenging to win a game, thereby setting up the in match play to feel lighter," Parish said.

Although the team did not come out with a win, they were proud of their hard work in making the playoffs. Regina Fong, a senior, expressed her gratitude for her teammates.

"I knew that the team had my back so I got a little less nervous but because I'm a senior the pressure to win intensified," Fong said.

Recounting her first year on the team, Fong said that she really loved the team's uplifting environment and was always looking forward to the start of a new season.

"Playing on the volleyball team has been a journey. In the beginning I was playing because it helped me forget about the stress about just starting high school. And throughout the years it has remained a thing I always looked forward to," Fong said.

Sydney Mackler, another senior on the team, has had a similar experience playing on the team since her freshman year.

"Volleyball has definitely given me so much confidence. My position is a setter, so you kind of lead the team, and you run the offense. And, I've made some of the best friends I could ever have asked for on the team, so volleyball is just a great environment to me," Mackler said.

Parish also had similar remarks about the team.

"Coaching girls volleyball is a joy, as these players are immensely talented and dedicated. They work very hard and I am proud of the way that the varsity team has created an environment of determination to win and dedication to the well-being of all players on all three teams in the program," Parish said.

With regards to their goals for the future, Parish states that they hope to make it even farther into the tournament in future years.

"Next season our goal is to again make the state tournament and to place third or higher in the regular season for the Middlesex League," Parish said.

Athlete of the Issue: Rachel Caldwell-Glixon, a Pentathlete

Photo by Anya Ghali. *Senior Rachel Caldwell-Glixon*

Garen Sahakian
Bryant Xia
Staff Writers

Rachel Caldwell-Glixon, a senior and a pentathlete, has committed to Lehigh University as a Division I competitor in track.

Caldwell-Glixon first began competing in outdoor track in middle school. Since then, she has picked up her training regimen and taken part in more competitions.

She had a breakout season in her sophomore year, advancing to Nationals and winning MIAA Division I for pentathlon. Her impressive record earned her a place on the Boston Globe's Girl's Track All-Scholastics list.

However, her track career has not always been smooth. Along the way, Caldwell-Glixon has had to overcome physical and mental challenges.

"Freshman year I had a bad ankle injury, so I was out for basically both of the seasons, and then junior year I suffered from, I guess you could say, mental blocks, which are pretty impacting so you have to learn how to work around them," Caldwell-Glixon said.

Working around these challenges was no small task. Her performance in high jump during her junior year prompted her to reconsider if she wanted to continue the event.

"I would come to practice, I wouldn't say sad, but I would be discouraged," Caldwell-Glixon said.

She was not alone in dealing with these issues, however. Luckily, Caldwell-Glixon's coaches provided the support that ultimately led her to rebound.

"My coaches have been really helpful in guiding me in the right steps I need to take and they help me with little adjustments that I necessarily won't see, and they are super understanding if you're not having the best day," Caldwell-Glixon said.

Her teammates were also essential in encouraging her to persist.

"I think my teammates help push each other to be the best athletes we can [be], so we are always there when we need each other," Caldwell-Glixon said.

With this encouragement, Caldwell-Glixon persevered as a pentathlete. As a participant of this competitive event, she has come to learn that challenges are simply another opportunity to excel.

"Setbacks aren't necessarily a bad thing and although they can be super frustrating, once you work around them they can help your confidence and you can be a better athlete," Caldwell-Glixon said.

After her performance throughout her high school career, Caldwell-Glixon now prepares to finish off her senior season strong and continue competing at the collegiate level.

Girls Varsity Soccer Team Ends Season at Playoff Game

Sidharth Vij
Sarah Liu
Staff Writers

On Nov. 7, Lexington High School's girls varsity soccer team competed in a playoff game at Andover High School. The team finished the season with a final score win to tie to the loss ratio of 12:5:4.

In preparation for the game, the team practiced drills and participated in team bonding activities.

"At the beginning of the season, we went to Kennebunkport in Maine for the long Labor Day weekend, which was the perfect way for 21 high school girls to get to know each other before the season started," Sudi Zhao, a sophomore team member, said. In addition, the team had dinner together every night before a game.

The girls team also possesses collective beliefs.

"We believe in confidence, not arrogance. When we go into games we want to feel confident about ourselves and how we play but we don't want to be arrogant and think too highly of ourselves," Sophia Coe, a freshman team member, said.

The score of the game after full time was 1-1, with a goal scored by Isabelle Konijnenberg, a freshman. Although the score of the game was tied, Lexington lost the game in a penalty kick shootout. Due to this loss, the team will not be advancing to the state tournament.

Despite the loss, members of the team still found the experience invaluable.

"It was a good experience to play with older girls so that I could look up to them and it really helped improve my game," Coe said.

The team finished the season with a positive record. Besides having a successful season on the field, the team members became a tight-knit group of friends.

"I think overall, spending hours together almost everyday really brought us all together, and it's like we are a second family of best friends. This is what is great about team sports; all the connections and friendships you make. Although there is always next year, this season will be a hard one to let go," Zhao said.